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A

SERMON

AGAINST

PERSECUTION:

Preached at HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING,

On Sunday, July 16, 1780.

BY

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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LUKE ix. 55. 56.

He turned, and rebuked them, and ſaid, ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of: for the ſon of man is not come to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.

OUR Lord's Miniſtry was now drawing towards a concluſion, and he was on his way to attend his laſt paſſover, at which he was to be ſeized by the Jews and put to death. *When the*

time was come that he ſhould be received up, he ſtedfaſtly ſet his face to go to Jeruſalem.

He was travelling by ſlow journies from Galilee the northern province of the holy land, to Judæa on the South; and in his way he muſt neceſſarily paſs through Samaria which lay between: *and he ſent meſſengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him, and they did not receive him, becauſe his face was as though he would go to Jeruſalem.*

This will require ſome explanation.

The Jews and Samaritans had long been at variance. A temple had been erected upon mount Gerizim near Sichem the capital city of Samaria, which the

the inhabitants of that country had ſet up in oppoſition to the temple at Jeruſalem. This had produced a religious diſpute between them, which by degrees had grown up into a fixed and ſettled hatred; often breaking out into acts of open outrage and violence. Of this difference we find many traces in the New Teſtament, eſpecially in that memorable converſation between our Saviour and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: wherein we find the woman expreſſing her ſurprize that *He who was a Jew* ſhould even aſk *water to drink* of *her who was a Samaritan*; and the Evangeliſt aſſigns this reaſon for her ſurpriſe, that *the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

And afterwards, when our Saviour had convinced her that ſhe talked with

no ordinary perſon, but with a great and inſpired prophet, ſhe took the opportunity of appealing to him to determine the great queſtion between them, concerning their rival worſhip. *Sir*, ſaid ſhe, *I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worſhipped in this mountain, and yet ye ſay, that in Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to worſhip.* Our Saviour, in reply, ſatisfied her, that the Jews had, indeed, the better of the argument, and that they were in the right with regard to the point then in diſpute. *Ye worſhip*, ſaid he, *ye know not what: we know what we worſhip: for ſalvation is of the Jews.* But at the ſame time he aſſured her, that the whole ground of this diſpute ſhould ſoon be removed; that the Moſaic inſtitution was haſtening to its concluſion; that the time would ſoon arrive

rive when they ſhould no longer have it in their power to worſhip God either in this mountain, or yet at Jeruſalem; when both their rival temples ſhould be laid in ruins, and with them the whole ceremonial law ſhould be overthrown: and then, that the true worſhip of God ſhould no longer be confined to any particular place, as it was by their law, but ſhould ſpread through all countries, and be laid open to all people. *Believe me, woman,* ſaid Jeſus unto her, *the hour cometh, when ye ſhall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jeruſalem worſhip the father; when by the true worſhippers he ſhall be worſhipped,* not by coſtly offerings and outward ceremonies, but, by the Religion of the heart, *in ſpirit and in truth; for the father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him:* the end of all God's religious diſpenſations being to bring

bring mankind by degrees to the knowledge and practice of that true, inward, and ſpiritual worſhip. For *God is a Spirit*, and therefore, *they that would worſhip him* acceptably, *muſt worſhip him in ſpirit, and in truth.*

This ſhews us clearly the nature of that diſpute which ſubſiſted between the Jews and the Samaritans, and the height to which it had been carried; even to the total breach of all good neighbourhood, and the interruption of all kind and brotherly offices; ſo that *the Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

Now we muſt ſuppoſe that the inhabitants of the village to which our Lord had ſent his diſciples to procure and prepare for him ſuch accommodations and re-

refreſhments as were neceſſary for a traveller, were warm and zealous advocates for the purity of their worſhip, and the ſuperiority of their temple to that at Jeruſalem.

The circumſtances of the ſtory oblige us likewiſe to ſuppoſe, that our Lord had already paſſed by Sichem and Mount Gerizim, and had left them behind him on the north; and that he was directing his journey ſouthwards, in his way to Jeruſalem. This the inhabitants of the village would eaſily perceive by the direction in which he was travelling, which gave them reaſon to conclude, that he was going to Jeruſalem, to keep there the approaching* feſtival. This amounted to an open declaration againſt their worſhip at Mount

* Suppoſed to be the feaſt of dedication.

Mount Gerizim, and clearly manifeſted his ſenſe of the matter to be, that Jeruſalem was the place, *where*, at that time, *men ought to worſhip*.

This ſlight put upon their temple, and their worſhip they reſented ſo highly, that they would not receive into their village, nor entertain in their houſes, one whom they looked upon to be a declared enemy to their religion. *They did not receive him, becauſe his face was, as though he would go to Jeruſalem.*

Their religious zeal, and the reſentment kindled by it, will appear to be the ſtronger, when we conſider, that they were led by it, to violate the laws of hoſpitality, which have ever been held ſacred, and to which the greateſt re-

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gard hath at all times been paid by all the people of the eaſt. Nay, to ſo great a degree is this point carried amongſt them to this day, that even the wild Arabs, who live by robbery and plunder, never fail to receive kindly and hoſpitably the ſtranger that comes under their roof.

We may judge therefore of the warmth of their reſentment, ſince it could induce them to ſhew unkindneſs to a ſtranger and a traveller, and to break thoſe laws of hoſpitality, the force of whoſe obligation they would have been, at any other time, moſt forward to acknowledge.

The diſciples, James and John, took fire at the rude reception they had met with, and were for pouring inſtant de-

ſtruction upon the heads of miſcreants who had ſhut their doors againſt a ſtranger. *Lord*, ſaid they, *wilt thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven, and conſume them, even as Elias did?* They thought it a caſe which deſerved the avenging hand of heaven; and that our Lord's divine power could not be more properly exerted than in the immediate deſtruction of wretches like theſe.

But our Lord turned and rebuked them, and ſaid, ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of, for the Son of Man is not come to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.

That is: "your intemperate warmth "on this occaſion, and the zeal you "pretend to ſhew for my honour, are "ſo

" ſo far from deſerving my approbation,
" that they call for my ſevereſt reproof.
" Theſe people have treated us rudely
" and inhoſpitably, and thereby have
" violated one of the firſt laws of hu-
" manity: and this they have done in
" return for a ſlight they think we have
" offered to that temple which they
" hold ſacred, and to mark their diſlike
" of our religious principles. Their in-
" hoſpitable conduct proceeding from a
" falſe zeal, hath raiſed in you an high
" degree of reſentment; and your abhor-
" rence of them for their inhumanity, and
" their adherence to a miſtaken worſhip,
" is ſuch, as you think will juſtify your
" prayers to heaven for their deſtruction,
" and your calling down the divine ven-
" geance to ſweep them away from the
" face of the earth. But in this you
" betray a zeal leſs juſtifiable than theirs,

" and an utter ignorance of the nature
" and deſign of that religion which I am
" come to plant on earth. All ſevere
" and violent meaſures, every degree of
" cruelty, every ſpark of an avenging
" and deſtructive zeal, are incon-
" ſiſtent with the temper which you
" ought to learn of me. And whether
" they are exerted in return for ſome in-
" jury that hath been done to yourſelves;
" or in ſupport of the dignity of that
" prophetical office which you bear; or
" to maintain the honour of that reli-
" gion which you profeſs, and of that
" maſter whom you ſerve: they only
" ſhew that you know not yet what
" *ſpirit* a diſciple of Chriſt *ought to be of*,
" nor what is the true purpoſe and de-
" ſign of his ſacred inſtitution; for he
" came *not to deſtroy men's lives, but to*
" *ſave them.*"

Such

Such is the warmth with which our Lord repreſſes, and ſuch the arguments with which he oppoſes, all religious cruelty, all deeds or deſigns of ſpiritual reſentment and revenge. He ſays firſt, that they are contrary to that temper and ſpirit which a chriſtian ought to be of: and ſecondly, that they are inconſiſtent with the deſign on which he came into the world.

Firſt: All furious and avenging zeal, all employment of the powers of religion to the deſtruction or injury of our brethren, are contrary to that temper and ſpirit which a chriſtian ought to be of.

For the Leſſons which a Chriſtian learns in the Goſpel, are not thoſe of high-ſpirited reſentment, retaliation, and revenge; but thoſe of meekneſs, moderation

ration, patience, and forbearance. We there imbibe the principles of univerſal good will, and learn to wiſh well, and to do good to all mankind. We learn to forgive injuries, and to be patient under wrongs; to return good for evil; to love our enemies; to ſeek the benefit even of thoſe who hate us; and, ſo far from calling upon heaven to avenge us of our adverſaries, we learn to pray for the welfare even of thoſe who deſpitefully uſe and perſecute us. In a word, our hearts are filled with kind and gentle affections; we are moved and actuated by the ſpirit of love, joy, and peace; charity and brotherly love take root within us, and render us truly ſociable, benevolent, and humane; tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us all.

In

In the ſecond place; they who ſeek to injure or deſtroy their brethren, by thoſe powers wherewith they are entruſted for the ſervice of religion, act a part inconſiſtent with the deſign of our Saviour's coming into the world.

We know that he came to ſave a loſt and periſhing world; to redeem all mankind from condemnation, and from death; and to reſtore them to happineſs and to eternal life. In purſuit of this great deſign, he hath done all that heavenly goodneſs could do, to remove or to ſoften thoſe evils to which we ſtand expoſed; to render the yoke of our mortal ſtate eaſy, and the burthen of our afflictions light; and where they cannot be removed conſiſtently with that ſtate of trial in which we are here placed, he hath given us the comfort of

his

his holy ſpirit to ſtrengthen our ſouls, and to enable us to bear them; together with the enlivening hopes, and the joyful proſpect of a better life ſoon to ſucceed.

This then being the caſe, it is extremely evident, that they who ſeek to diſtreſs or deſtroy their brethren, though under a religious pretence, are ſtrangers to that ſpirit which a chriſtian ought to be of; and act in direct oppoſition to that deſign upon which Chriſt came into the world. For the ſpirit that a Chriſtian ought to be of, is a ſpirit of forgiveneſs, forbearance, charity, and love; whereas they indulge a ſpirit of cruelty, reſentment, and revenge. And the deſign upon which Chriſt came into the world, was to ſave men's lives, and to make them happy;

whereas

whereas they ſeek to deſtroy men's lives, and to make them miſerable. So that they act in direct oppoſition both to the doctrine and the example of Chriſt.

Such is the clear and undoubted doctrine of our Lord himſelf. From which I ſhall take occaſion at this time to obſerve to you, by way of inference, that there cannot be a ſtronger or a fuller refutation of the principles and practices of thoſe who encourage and promote perſecution for the ſake of religion, than our Lord himſelf hath given us in the obſervations which he hath here made on the conduct of his apoſtles.

If any occaſion could have juſtified a warm reſentment, if any thing could have warranted a perſecuting and de-

ſtroying zeal, it ſhould ſeem to have been the behaviour of theſe Samaritans. The worſhip of the Samaritans was manifeſtly wrong, and had been condemned by our Lord himſelf; and they had in an unwarrantable manner ſeparated themſelves from the body of thoſe who worſhipped God according to his own appointment; and thus had made a violent and fatal ſchiſm or ſeparation in the church. And yet in defence of their own erroneous worſhip, and in reſentment of a ſlight, which they thought had been put upon it, they offered a perſonal inſult to our Lord himſelf.

But when the diſciples, warmed with indignation at an offence of ſo high and aggravated a nature, thought that the behaviour of theſe Samaritans merited an exemplary chaſtiſement; and that the

ven-

vengeance of Heaven ſhould be let looſe upon them: our Saviour rebuked them, and told them, that, by this intemperate and ungoverned zeal, ſo contrary to the ſpirit and deſign of true religion, they were guilty of a greater offence than that which they were ſo forward to chaſtiſe.

Since then our Lord would not ſuffer his own diſciples to employ that heavenly power with which they were inveſted, to the hurt and deſtruction of thoſe who had been guilty of a groſs and perſonal offence againſt himſelf: where is that daring and preſumptuous power upon earth, which will boldly and profanely claim to itſelf, a right which our Lord denied to his own diſciples? a right of tyranniſing and reducing again into captivity thoſe whom Chriſt hath

made free; and of rendering that goſpel, which was given for the comfort, light, and joy of the world, the means of ſpreading and propagating amongſt mankind, diſtreſs, darkneſs, and miſery?

It is a reproach to human nature that a ſyſtem of the cruelleſt tyranny over the perſons and minds of men, ſhould have been eſtabliſhed, ſupported, and for ages exerciſed without reſiſtance. And that this ſyſtem ſhould have been conducted by thoſe who impiouſly call themſelves the repreſentatives of Chriſt on earth, and the rightful ſucceſſors of his apoſtles: that their miniſters and adherents ſhould long have been ſuffered to terrify mankind, and to torment them in the name of the merciful Jeſus: that they ſhould even have gone ſo far as to take

take away the lives of men, and to deſtroy their brethren, by an uſurped authority pretended to be derived from him, who hath aſſured us that he came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them——This is a thing too monſtrous for belief, did not well known facts compell it. All ſuch baſe and barbarous proceedings are ſhocking to humanity; are repugnant to the clear dictates of reaſon; are expreſly condemned by our Lord's own ſacred word; and are a manifeſt contradiction to that which he hath declared to be the end of his coming.

But if we juſtly condemn theſe principles and practices ſo abhorrent to the true ſpirit of chriſtianity, in the church of Rome; let us take care that we do not admit them amongſt ourſelves.

How

How inconſiſtent would it be, if, whilſt we blame their intolerant and perſecuting ſpirit, we ourſelves ſhould become perſecuting, and intolerant! "Thou that "ſayeſt, a chriſtian ſhould not perſe-"cute, doſt thou perſecute?" In vain ſhall we condemn and reprobate their principles by our words and writings, if we juſtify them by our practice.

A perſecuting ſpirit is the very worſt thing in the church of Rome. All her errors, groſs and numerous as they are, in compariſon with this, are pardonable. They may poſſibly proceed from a miſtaken judgment; they may find ſome excuſe in the power of early prejudice, and ſome ſupport in ſpecious, though fallacious, arguments. But intolerance and perſecution corrupt the heart; and excluding all charity wherever they gain

gain an entrance, ſtand in direct oppoſition to the very firſt and fundamental principles of our holy religion. I am ſure that there is nothing in the New Teſtament, that can juſtify any kind or degree of perſecution. I am ſure that a fierce and perſecuting zeal can find no place in a heart filled, as it ought to be, with the charitable, the generous, and the benevolent ſpirit of the goſpel of Chriſt.

I hope I need make no apology for introducing the ſubject at this time, and in this place. I am far from ſuppoſing that you want any caution againſt entertaining the unchriſtian ſpirit of perſecution. I am far from ſuppoſing that the contagion hath reached this congregation. But ſince it hath broke out in ſeveral parts of this diſtracted

tracted kingdom, and in ſome hath ſhewn itſelf in very unjuſtifiable acts of outrage and violence; the admonition cannot be unſeaſonable that we ſhould deſcend at this time into our own hearts, and carefully conſider how far they are influenced by that ſpirit which a diſciple of Chriſt ought to be of.

All force and violence, all deſigns of cruelty and perſecution, are contrary and abhorrent to the very nature of religion. For there cannot be the leaſt ſpark or breath of religion, where it is not willing, unconſtrained, and free.

The intereſts of chriſtianity can never be ſupported, but by encouraging and promoting the true and genuine ſpirit of the goſpel, which we know to be that of good will, of charity, of brotherly affection, and love.

If

If then cruelty and perſecution be directly oppoſite to this divine and heavenly ſpirit of charity and brotherly love; it is as plain as any thing can be, that perſecution of every kind, and in every degree, is contrary to the ſpirit, and deſtructive of the intereſts of chriſtianity.

Let us then, my brethren, always remember what ſpirit a diſciple of Chriſt ought to be of. Let us avoid all perſecution on account of differences in religious opinions; for the perſecutor himſelf is certainly the greateſt enemy, and the falſeſt traitor, to that religion which he pretends to ſupport.

Perſuaded of this, let us think ourſelves bound to refrain, not only from all force, oppreſſion, and open acts of vio-

lence againſt thoſe who differ from us; but even from all ſevere cenſures, and from all hard thoughts of them. Let it be our ſtudy and our aim to promote as wide and as far as we can, both by our doctrine and example, the true chriſtian ſpirit of charity and brotherly love. And though it be not in our power to ſave men's lives; for that is the great and only work of him who died for the redemption and ſalvation of us all; yet let it be our unwearied endeavour, in humble imitation of his great example, to contribute, as far as in us lies, to their welfare and happineſs; and to apply ſuch powers and abilities as God hath given us towards rendering comfortable the lives of thoſe whom Chriſt came to ſave.

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